

Community resources

[Follow us on Twitter](#) [Check our Reddit](#) [Twitter this](#) [Digg this page](#) [Contact us on IRC](#)

courage is contagious

Viewing cable 06SANSALVADOR2508, EL SALVADOR: FMLN "PRESIDENCIALES" FOR 2009

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g.

#06SANSALVADOR2508.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06SANSALVADOR2508	2006-10-16 21:32	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy San Salvador

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.wikileaks.elfaro.net/es/201106/notas/4565/>

VZCZCXYZ0008
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSN #2508/01 2892132
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 162132Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4042
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 002508

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2016

TAGS: [ES](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: FMLN "PRESIDENCIALES" FOR 2009

REF: A. SAN SALVADOR 712

[1](#)B. SAN SALVADOR 2008
[1](#)C. SAN SALVADOR 2056
[1](#)D. SAN SALVADOR 2204

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: With two and a half years to go until the 2009 presidential election, speculation is emerging with regard to who will be the candidate of the opposition Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). Orthodox-hardliner leader Schafik Handal was beaten soundly in 2004 by ARENA's Tony Saca, leading some to conclude that a fresh face from outside party circles--and one not associated with the nation's bloody 12-year armed conflict--might fare better in 2009. Possible candidates include, in addition to veterans of the party's highly-disciplined hardliner core, a leftist television commentator and a former ARENA cabinet member. The FMLN's orthodox leadership, who since the 2004 election have expelled all moderates and consolidated control of the party, may have to make a difficult choice between unquestioning obedience to the party's platform versus victory at the polls. END SUMMARY

Background

¶2. (C) In the wake of 2003 national congressional and municipal elections, prior to the FMLN's selection of its presidential candidate for 2004, polls showed that a more moderate candidate such as television commentator Mauricio Funes could defeat an ARENA candidate by perhaps 10 percent. Following the FMLN's selection of veteran orthodox-hardline leader Schafik Handal as the candidate who would oppose ARENA's Tony Saca, this advantage was quickly lost. Although mere weeks prior to the March 2004 election a quarter of the electorate remained undecided, Handal went on to a stunning defeat in all 14 of El Salvador's departments, including longtime FMLN bastions Morazan, Chalatenango, and metropolitan San Salvador, garnering only 36 percent of the vote to Saca's 58 percent. In recent months, some members of the FMLN inner circle have discussed whether a candidate from outside the party might be better able to deliver the Casa Presidencial in 2009 (reftel B).

Possible 2009 FMLN Presidential Candidates

¶3. (C) Journalist Mauricio Funes began his career as a television commentator in 1986, during the nation's armed conflict; his morning show on Channel 12 established a reputation as a left-of-center forum reserved primarily for FMLN sympathizers. In 2005, Channel 12's Mexican parent company Azteca fired Funes without notice, citing unprofitably low ratings for his show. Many on the left insisted that Funes's dismissal was due to his political orientation, and charged that it would exert a chilling effect on freedom of the press in El Salvador. Other observers of the political scene opined that Funes had misused his access to the media to promote his own political ambitions, and outlined how that tendency, in conjunction with his often-overbearing and intolerant personality, had been his undoing at Channel 12. (Note: In April 2003, Funes openly outlined his willingness to stand as an FMLN presidential candidate under certain conditions, to which the FMLN leadership responded that a vice presidential slot was the best they could offer--and that Funes must first join the party. End note.) After his departure from Channel 12, Funes reestablished his media presence with a show on the Megavision network's Channel 21, and he occasionally serves as a correspondent for the CNN's Spanish-language version. Funes is 47 years old; his marriage to childhood actress Regina Canas (with whom he has two sons) resulted in divorce; he is often seen publicly with the Brazilian Embassy's Cultural Affairs Officer Wanda Pignato, and the two will apparently soon marry.

¶4. (C) FMLN Coordinator General Medardo Gonzalez better fits the traditional mold of FMLN presidential candidates. Gonzalez fought as a Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) guerrilla under the nom de guerre "Comandante Milton Mendez".

(Note: The FPL was one of the five political-military organizations that combined to form the FMLN in October 1980. End note.) An unsuccessful candidate for FMLN Coordinator General in 1997 among a field of four, Gonzalez finally won the office in September 2004 by beating out Santa Tecla Mayor Oscar Ortiz. Gonzalez was closely allied with Handal, whose orthodox faction still tightly controls the FMLN.

15. (C) Although San Salvador Mayor Dr. Violeta Menjivar eked out a narrow victory--by a 44-vote margin--in the hotly-contested and controversial March mayoral election (reftel A), she has since struggled to address the capital city's daunting problems of violent crime, garbage collection, and crumbling, inadequate infrastructure (reftel C). Menjivar's name is perennially floated as a possible candidate whenever the discussion turns to 2009, but her FMLN mayoral predecessors (Hector Silva and Carlos Rivas Zamora) learned that attempting to govern a metropolis with more problems than resources is less likely to lead to the presidency than to political exile. The 55-year-old Dr. Menjivar is a guerrilla veteran; from 1980 until war's end in 1992, she organized and ran medical units that served FMLN insurgents. After the armed conflict, she served on the party's powerful Political Commission, and in 1997 was made FMLN Deputy Coordinator General. Menjivar served three terms in the Legislative Assembly (1997-2006); in 1999 she declined an offer to be her party's vice presidential candidate. After she was hand-picked to run for mayor, FMLN hardliners dispatched Menjivar to Cuba for political training by the Communist Party of Cuba. Menjivar hews closely to orthodox views; at a 2003 human rights conference, she angrily denounced the United States as the ultimate source of all the world's human rights abuses.

16. (C) Oscar Ortiz is the popular FMLN mayor of San Salvador suburb--and La Libertad departmental capital--Santa Tecla (population 190,000). Although he also lost out to Schafik Handal in his attempt to become the party's 2004 presidential candidate, he has already alluded publicly to a possible 2009 presidential bid, though his overtures were very coolly received at FMLN headquarters (reftel B). Like Coordinator-General Gonzalez, the 45-year-old Ortiz was an FPL guerrilla, and went on to become an influential FMLN military leader after the FPL's 1980 incorporation into the FMLN. Although never officially charged in the crime, Ortiz is widely acknowledged to have assassinated President Cristiani's Minister of the Presidency Jose Antonio Rodriguez Porth (father-in-law of 1999-2004 President Francisco Flores) in June 1989. Although his relationship with the FMLN's powerful hardliner faction is chilly, Ortiz himself is not especially moderate in his political views. He is dedicated, hard-working, and ambitious, and is careful in maintaining cordial and open relations with the Embassy.

17. (C) Arturo Zablah served as Minister of Economy and Presidential Commissioner for Trade Negotiations under ARENA President Alfredo Cristiani (1989-1994), and afterwards as President of the Autonomous Port Executive Commission (CEPA) under ARENA President Armando Calderon Sol (1994-1999). Late in Calderon Sol's term, Zablah began to stray from the ARENA ranks, and after leaving office was publicly critical of the 2001 "dollarization" of El Salvador's economy, and of CAFTA. (Note: Notwithstanding the positions he has held, Zablah has no educational background in Economics; he received his Industrial Engineering degree from Monterrey (Mexico) Institute of Technology in 1976, followed by an M.S. in Systems Analysis from Georgia Tech in 1980. End note.) Now 52 years old, Zablah has returned to managing a family furniture and mattress company, Industrias Capri, where he worked prior to his political career. In an interview with Salvadoran online newspaper "El Faro", Zablah criticized the administration of President Francisco Flores (1999-2004), whom he blamed for worsening the polarization that characterizes the nation's political environment. Zablah repeated his condemnation of dollarization and free trade, including CAFTA, and outlined how in the past, he had once held dialogue with the FMLN regarding a possible vice-presidential candidacy.

18. (C) COMMENT: The FMLN has lost every postwar presidential election by a margin of 22-24 percent of the vote. Polling data publicized in September by leading daily La Prensa Grafica showed Mauricio Funes with the highest approval rating among all potential FMLN presidential candidates, followed by Oscar Ortiz and Violeta Menjivar. With President Saca's approval ratings slipping as Salvadorans' concerns grow regarding the country's spiraling violent crime (reftel D), ARENA appears vulnerable for 2009. Furthermore, no prospective ARENA candidate has emerged as a frontrunner, nor is Saca grooming one at this time. The FMLN leadership must ultimately decide whether their business-as-usual process of naming a battle-hardened old-guard communist as presidential candidate will serve them best in 2009, or whether the time has finally come to try a new approach with fresh faces, with all the risk that entails to the party's iron-fisted internal discipline.
BARCLAY